

This Copy For

# 1628

WITH RON ZIEGLER

12:15 P.M. EST

DECEMBER 21, 1972

THURSDAY

(Key Biscayne, Florida)

MR. ZIEGLER: The President is working over at the office at his residence this morning. He has had a number of extensive phone conversations this morning with members of his staff, including Dr. Kissinger.

General Haig will be arriving at Homestead Air Force Base tomorrow morning at 7:00 o'clock. He will be meeting with the President and Dr. Kissinger at some point tomorrow morning to report on his recent trip, so that will be on the President's schedule tomorrow.

The President will continue to work through the remainder of the day at the residence. As I said, he has been in his office this morning talking with members of his staff by phone.

The President has asked me this morning to announce his intention to nominate Richard Helms to be Ambassador to Iran. Dick Helms will succeed Joseph Farland in that post, who will be returning to Washington to receive an assignment to another important position. So Dick Helms will be nominated by the President to be Ambassador to Iran, and Joseph Farland, the current Ambassador, will be returning to Washington to receive an assignment to another important post which we will announce in the near future.

The President is also designating James Schlesinger, currently Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, for nomination to succeed Mr. Helms as Director of Central Intelligence.

The President, as you know, met with Director Helms at Camp David on the 20th of November, shortly after the election. At that time, Director Helms reminded the President and discussed with the President the fact that the CIA had a general policy under his leadership of having officials retire when they reach the age of 60. Dick Helms, who will be 60 in March of next year, expressed the feeling that he should follow the same retirement policy which has been in effect at CIA.

The President and Director Helms talked about that for a period. The President requested that Dick Helms remain in Government and offered him the position which I have announced this morning. Dick Helms has accepted it.

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The President, of course, has the greatest respect and deepest appreciation for the extremely able and devoted service which Mr. Helms has given to this country for more than a generation. As most of you know, he has been with the CIA since its beginning in 1947. Prior to that, he was a member of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II and has served as Deputy Director of the CIA and also Director of the CIA since 1966.

The President felt, as I said, that Mr. Helms should remain in Government service and is pleased that he has accepted the new position which I have referred to.

The President is also pleased that a man of James Schlesinger's background and ability is available to succeed Mr. Helms as Director of Central Intelligence. Mr. Schlesinger has been Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission since August of 1971. Before that, he served in the Office of Management and Budget, and in its predecessor organization, the Bureau of the Budget. As an Assistant Director of these units, he was responsible for national security and international programs.

Mr. Schlesinger came to the Federal Government in 1969 from the Rand Corporation, where he was Director of Strategic Studies. Before that, he was a professor at the University of Virginia from 1955 to 1963. I should mention that Mr. Schlesinger met with the President at Camp David on November 21st.

The President has also asked me to tell you this morning that he is accepting with very special regret the resignation of David Abshire as Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations. Mr. Abshire plans to return to Georgetown University as Chairman and Executive Director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The President commends his excellent performance and outstanding abilities, and is grateful for his service in the State Department over the past years.

The President also wanted to announce today that he has asked David Abshire to be his first appointee to the newly created Commission for the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, a commission which you are all familiar with.

The commission to which David Abshire will be the first appointee was created by law on July 13, 1972 to make a broad review of the Government's foreign policy machinery. The President was grateful that Assistant Secretary Abshire has agreed to serve as a member. The commission will ultimately be composed of 12 members, two public and two Government appointees of the President, four appointees of the President of the Senate and four appointees of the Speaker of the House.

As I mentioned, the commission was established by Public Law 92-352 on July 13, 1972, and is due to report its findings to the President and to the Congress by June 30, 1974.

Those are all the announcements that we have today.

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Q Is there any truth to reports of a split between Dr. Kissinger and Director Helms that led to the Director's demise from his position?

MR. ZIEGLER: Absolutely none.

Q Ron, will General Haig fly to Washington before he comes here, or will he come here directly from Saigon?

MR. ZIEGLER: He will be flying directly from Thailand. He will fly from Bangkok and arrive here in Miami at 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

Q Has the President delivered an ultimatum to North Vietnam and South Vietnam in terms of cutting off aid to the South and bombing the North in a concentrated way to end the war?

MR. ZIEGLER: Helen, your question, I know, is stimulated by the stories that have appeared this morning. As I have already said to those who have asked me, I would have no comment on those stories, no comment on the speculation or the rumors that are coming from various capitals.

Q Ron, would you be able to tell us whether there was, in fact, a letter from the President delivered by General Haig, and whether he is bringing one back?

MR. ZIEGLER: I believe I mentioned -- or maybe I did not -- at the time General Haig left that he did carry a letter from President Nixon to President Thieu, but this letter should be seen as part of our continuing communication and consultation with President Thieu. I, of course, cannot comment on the content of the letter in any way at all.

Q The word "ultimatum" is a very strong term. Do you take any issue with the use of this word in these stories?

MR. ZIEGLER: Helen, that word has come about by the source stories and the speculative stories. I have no comment on those stories.

Q Ron, what about the second part of my question? Is General Haig bringing a letter back?

MR. ZIEGLER: I do not want to say specifically today until General Haig gets back, but he, of course, will be bringing communications with him from President Thieu, based on their talks, Bob.

Q Presumably a number of members of the American public are considerably disappointed in the way the peace negotiations seem to have broken down. Is it too early for the President to make any expression of regret or hope or expectation or disappointment? Why aren't we doing anything?

MR. ZIEGLER: You have heard what the United States policy is. I have stated it, and also Dr. Kissinger stated it in detail. You know what our policy is in relation to the situation in Vietnam. Our May 8 policy is in effect. You know what our feeling is in relation to the negotiations. We stand ready to negotiate a settlement. I have said this completely.

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I think you know our view and know the facts as we have presented them as to why the negotiations aren't proceeding. If the North Vietnamese adopt a constructive attitude and a spirit of good will, a negotiated settlement can be reached. This is the spirit in which we will proceed with negotiations. We are prepared for a negotiated settlement, as I said yesterday, along the lines that we nearly agreed to in Paris previously.

Q Then take Point No. 1 of the 9-point accord. It confirms the territorial unity of Vietnam, meaning one country. Are you prepared to back that up?

MR. ZIEGLER: Helen, you know full well that I am not going to get into a discussion of any aspect of the negotiations or anything that relates to the details of the negotiations.

Q You say we are prepared for a negotiated settlement along the lines nearly agreed to in Paris previously. Does that refer to October, or does that refer to the most recent negotiating sessions?

MR. ZIEGLER: I am referring to what Dr. Kissinger referred to the other day in his briefing: the movement that led us to the position we were in in October, and then, as he has explained, the initial period even in November where the North Vietnamese were involved in the negotiations in a constructive way. We stand where we are now because of, as Dr. Kissinger explained, the attitude they adopted at a point in the November negotiating sessions.

Q Ron, in a session last week with us, you were asked two questions that were a little "Ziegled" in the answer. I wonder if you can elaborate on them: One was whether or not Dr. Kissinger had exchanged messages with Le Duc Tho as arranged, and the second question was whether or not the United States was talking with Moscow and/or Peking in efforts to reinstitute these talks. In both instances I think you told us to presume that the United States is doing possible. Can you elaborate what that is?

MR. ZIEGLER: The answer to your first question is the one I gave previously when I have been asked on several occasions. We have told you that the two sides would remain in touch through the exchange of messages. But I am not going to say to you when those exchanges take place, or if they have. I will simply tell you that we will stay in touch that way.

In response to your second question, I had no comment and I will not today, regarding our diplomatic contacts; if, when and how they occur. I think that is a position that you can understand.

Without relating to any specific country, I did make a comment which I will repeat again today. I think it would be a very proper conclusion for you to draw that the United States, wanting to seek a negotiated settlement, wanting to end this war through a negotiated settlement, wanting to get our prisoners home, wanting to stop the killing, wanting this matter to come to an end, wanting to proceed with the negotiations in a spirit of good will, is pursuing every channel

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and every avenue that would assist in reaching that objective.

But I will not go beyond that in terms of speaking specifically about diplomatic contacts other than the fact that you know that General Haig, of course, has completed now, and is returning to the United States from a series of consultations with Asian leaders over the past three or four days.

Q Chairman Brezhnev, in Moscow, has now made a rather strong statement condemning the U.S. resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam. My question is: Is the President at all concerned that this new policy of resuming the war in the North may affect our relations with the Soviet Union?

MR. ZIEGLER: I have no comment on Chairman Brezhnev's remarks which you referred to and would not offer an assessment.

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Q Ron, this is not a Pentagon question. My question is: Does the President have a line drawn against civilian casualties? There seems to be a step-up in civilian casualties in North Vietnam. It goes back to the Johnson Administration where there was a line drawn where the targets were military only. Is there a change in that?

MR. ZIEGLER: I would quarrel with your question. The Pentagon spoke in their briefing yesterday and will again today on the targeting aspects.

Q Can you say whether or not Hanoi got any indication from us that the bombing resumption was a likely outcome of their position in the peace talks?

MR. ZIEGLER: No, I would not. I have seen stories this morning that referred to that. I would not comment on that. I would simply say that our May 8th policy, which you are aware of, is in effect. The President's May 8th policy was clearly outlined at the time he announced it. The steps that we took between May 8th and now in relation to the negotiations were steps taken because the negotiations were proceeding in a constructive way.

My announcement the other day in which I told you that the May 8th policy is in effect because the North Vietnamese were not proceeding in the negotiations in a constructive way, I think, was quite clear.

Q But there were some reports to the effect that Hanoi school children were evacuated well in advance of the resumption of the bombing. The question was whether they either anticipated the resumption of the bombing on their own by simply analysis or whether or not we had given them some signal.

MR. ZIEGLER: This is not a comment from me, but it is part of this exchange. Also in that same speculation some have observed that perhaps the North Vietnamese, if they did take that step, took that step because they were aware that they were not proceeding in a constructive way and were also aware of the May 8th policy as outlined by the President.

Q But you will not go any further.

MR. ZIEGLER: No.

Q What, if any, reaction in telegrams and letters has the President received?

MR. ZIEGLER: I have not checked, but I am not aware of any extensive mail or telegram input into the White House. I think the reason is because the President clearly spelled out the policy we are proceeding with on May 8th, as you recall. People realize that the President has a responsibility to conduct the negotiations and to proceed with the policy in relation to the situation. He spelled that out on May 8th.

Q Ron, has the Polish Government protested the damage or sinking of the Polish freighter and casualties and what is our response?

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MR. ZIEGLER: We have received a note protesting damage. As you know, and the State Department has spelled this out, it is not our policy to target third-country shipping. If any damage was done it is completely accidental and we would regret it. I understand from my discussions this morning that a response to the Polish note is now in preparation and the State Department will be handling any other questions along this line.

Q There is a UPI story out of Sacramento, California that says that about 100 pilots and crewmen attached to the 194th Early Warning Reconnaissance Squad have been sent to Florida to fly reconnaissance missions over South Florida and Cuba while the President is here for the Christmas holidays. The wife of one of these men, an Air Force Major, is saying the result is that these men will not be home for Christmas and she, at least, was somewhat upset about it. Is that the case, that about 100 members of this squadron have been assigned to this while he is here?

MR. ZIEGLER: I have not seen that UPI story and that is something I would not comment on in any way at all. I think people are aware that there are always some reconnaissance flights going on around Florida because of our particular situation in relation to Cuba. I would not have any comment beyond that.

Q I am not asking the question from the standpoint of whether or not such flights are flown. I am merely asking you whether or not these men have been brought all the way across country. I wonder if they have.

MR. ZIEGLER: I am not going to discuss that in any way. There are reconnaissance flights going on around Florida because of the reason that is obvious. I will not comment beyond that.

Q As you know, the Immigration Service is giving serious thought to deporting back to Cuba these three prisoners who hijacked a fishing boat. The local Cubans are up in arms about it and there have been some veiled threats, as you may have seen this morning, about the possibility of demonstrations of a questionable nature that might take place while the President is here. Does the President have any particular views himself about what ought to be done about these three guys?

MR. ZIEGLER: We are aware of the situation. I would just say we are certain that the Immigration and Naturalization Service will arrive at an equitable solution in regard to this matter. I suggest you pursue the story there.

Q Ron, I am at a loss to understand why you won't comment, not on the subject of whether there are reconnaissance flights, but whether a group of men have been brought 2,000 miles to do it. They want to be with their families and I am wondering why they had to be brought here and not a group stationed closer.

MR. ZIEGLER: I am not going to discuss reconnaissance flights or deployment of U. S. forces involved in reconnaissance flights.

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Q In the question of Mr. Helms' retirement in order to conform to a CIA policy, who retired from the CIA - Directorship at 60 in the past?

MR. ZIEGLER: Under Director Helms there has been a policy that officials in the CIA retire when they are 60. There have been a number of reasons for this. I was not referring only to the Director, but it has been a policy that CIA officials retire at 60. He wanted to conform with that.

Q Is this high officials only?

MR. ZIEGLER: I am not sure how deep that policy went, but this is a policy the Director followed at the CIA.

Q Did he put that policy into effect himself?

MR. ZIEGLER: It is my understanding that this is the policy followed under the Directorship of Mr. Helms, based on the fact, I am sure, that this would give young people an opportunity to move into the agency and keep it vital.

Q He didn't suggest that that should apply to the President; did he? (Laughter)

MR. ZIEGLER: No.

Q On the Helms matter, did the President wish, and does he now welcome a change in the Directorship of the CIA?

MR. ZIEGLER: John, all I can tell you is that in the discussions that took place at Camp David Director Helms pointed out what I have said to you about his desire to retire at 60. The President accepts that, understands it and thinks he has another very good man to run the Central Intelligence Agency.

Q Did the President ask Helms for his resignation?

MR. ZIEGLER: The circumstances are as I described them.

Q Before that meeting had he hoped Mr. Helms would stay on? Had he planned to ask him to stay on?

MR. ZIEGLER: As I said, they talked at some length about Director Helms' desire and wish to follow the policy which he had in effect. I have told you the set of circumstances. You are not going to drive me to another answer by your question that would suggest another premise. That is the way it happened.

Q Is it correct that Director Helms had submitted his resignation?

MR. ZIEGLER: Yes, he did, along with others.

Q Ron, can you tell us again whether there was a variance between, first of all, Mr. Helms' estimate of Soviet strategic missile deployment and the White House assessment and secondly, whether there was a variance between the White House assessments and other sources and Central Intelligence assessments of the likelihood of a build-up of the North Vietnamese for an invasion of the South?



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MR. ZIEGLER: No. Those are all old stories. I think they relate to the fact that there were differences that existed within the intelligence community and that there were some disturbances in the White House about those differences. That is off the mark. I am not going to talk about intelligence data that we receive. But I will tell you that it is off the mark to suggest that there was dissatisfaction with the work of Director Helms at CIA.

Q Where did these stories come from, Ron?

MR. ZIEGLER: I haven't the slightest idea.

Q Ron, is it not true that the President could have asked Mr. Helms to stay on and Mr. Helms would have been willing to do so?

MR. ZIEGLER: I don't know what his response would have been. They may have even talked about that, Bob.

Q There is no statutory requirement that Mr. Helms retire at 60; is there?

MR. ZIEGLER: No.

Q Sometime ago, if my memory is correct, the President appointed Mr. Helms as Chairman of a new committee or group to better correlate and pull together all American intelligence efforts. This was announced by the White House. What becomes of that position for Mr. Helms? Will Mr. Schlesinger take it on?

MR. ZIEGLER: I think so, yes. You are referring to an announcement the President made over a year ago. The President called for steps to be taken so that there could be a greater degree of interrelation between the various intelligence gathering aspects in the government. We have an intelligence community and the objective is to lock this together a little better.

Q Was the President satisfied with the job Mr. Helms did?

MR. ZIEGLER: Yes, he was; totally satisfied.

Q How long will the President continue the bombing escalation and is he prepared to go further with more escalation?

MR. ZIEGLER: Our policy is as described in the May 6th policy statement.

Q I just wondered if the President is at all considering a possible address to the American people on the subject of Vietnam in the near future.

MR. ZIEGLER: No, he does not plan that, as I said yesterday.

Q Ron, in your answer to Jerry's earlier questions about the Polish freighter, are you so finding that we did indeed hit this freighter in Haiphong?

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MR. ZIEGLER: I said we received a note of protest protesting damage. I have told you about our policy not to target third-country shipping. I said if any damage was done it was completely accidental and we would regret it. I said a response to the Polish note is in preparation. That is all I am prepared to say about this matter.

The State Department will take it from here. I said "if any damage occurred." I am not prepared to go beyond that, Gene.

Q Is the President concerned about the protest to the extent that he has taken steps to find out if there indeed has been any damage?

MR. ZIEGLER: I think that is implied in my statement. I said if any damage was done it would be completely accidental and we would regret it.

Q Would the regretting go to the extent of paying for the damages?

MR. ZIEGLER This is all I am prepared to say at this time.

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Q Will the change in the directorship of CIA, or a change in the mission, structure or policy of the agency?

MR. ZIEGLER: It certainly won't mean a change in the mission.

Q When was Schlesinger offered the post?

MR. ZIEGLER: Just in the last day or two. I believe it was two days ago when the offer was made.

Q How old is he?

MR. ZIEGLER: We will have a biography right out for you, Bob.

Q Will we see General Haig?

MR. ZIEGLER: No, he will not brief. We may have a photo, but there will be no announcements or briefing.

Q Can you finish up with the change in policy of the CIA?

MR. ZIEGLER: That depends on the new Director.

Q How about the desire of the President?

MR. ZIEGLER: Not in any specific way, but the President certainly will want Mr. Schlesinger as Director of the CIA, to pursue the course which he outlined at the time he appointed Director Helms to the position to head up the intelligence community committee. He will proceed along the lines announced at that time.

Q Has Director Schlesinger prepared a report for the President on the mission, structure and function of the CIA?

MR. ZIEGLER: Yes.

Q About the three Cubans in jail here, is there any possibility that they will be returned to Cuba as part of an anti-hijacking agreement?

MR. ZIEGLER: I have given you our response to the question on that matter.

Q Ron, based on General Haig's talks in Saigon, would you be willing to describe President Thieu's attitude as constructive?

MR. ZIEGLER: I would not describe it. It is not my position to describe President Thieu's attitude.

Q Will there be a successor to John Scalit?

MR. ZIEGLER: As I said, he is a hard man to replace. I said that at the time we announced his appointment.

That is the second time you have asked that question. I think you may have an interest. (Laughter)

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Q When will Dr. Kissinger leave Key Biscayne, and where will he go when he does?

MR. ZIEGLER: There are several answers I could give to that question, but I will give the factual one. I think he will leave after the meetings tomorrow and will be spending the holiday period with his children.

Q Did Dr. Kissinger see the President in person today?

MR. ZIEGLER: The President has conferred extensively with him this morning by telephone. He will confer with him tomorrow in person.

Q When the President and Helms met on November 21st, what was the sequence? Did the President first ask Mr. Helms to stay on, and then did Mr. Helms ask to be allowed to abide by the retirement policy?

MR. ZIEGLER: The President met with Director Helms on the 20th. I was not in that meeting, but if it was a meeting like most meetings the President held on this subject, they sat down and talked about the second term; they talked about the agency; the President asked him what his feelings were, what his intentions were, what he would like to do, and it all came out just as I told you.

Q In answer to a question before, you said Schlesinger prepared a paper on the mission and function of the CIA?

MR. ZIEGLER: I think that is what the question was. I think he has prepared some material for the President on the matter of the intelligence community, how it can be better coordinated, and as a part of that, referred to the functions of the CIA, yes. I have not read the paper and I do not have any further details.

Q The way you responded implied there was a new direction to be taken by the CIA; is that right?

MR. ZIEGLER: I answered that question earlier.

Q When was it prepared, this paper? This Fall?

MR. ZIEGLER: I don't know. Recently. I don't know the exact time period.

Q Will Patrick Gray be named as Director of the FBI?

MR. ZIEGLER: I have seen an awful lot of speculation. I think there were three major newspapers that were each in a separate direction on that speculation. The U A Times, I think, had him going, the Post had him staying, and the Star was in between on it. (Laughter)

All I can say is that the fact of the matter is that there is -- as much as I speak, of course, as I have for some of the papers I referred to -- that there is no decision on the matter. There have been no serious discussions on it, so I would not stay away from all of the speculation, don't pick up any of it at this time.

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Q Has the President seen Mr. Gray while he is -  
down here?

MR. ZIEGLER: No.

Q Has he asked Mr. Gray what he would like to do?

MR. ZIEGLER: They have not had a discussion yet.

Q A moment ago you referred to the Washington Post  
as a major newspaper. Did you mispeak?

MR. ZIEGLER: It is a major local newspaper.

Q Is there any truth to speculation about a growing estrangement between Henry Kissinger and the President because of the status of the Vietnam talks?

MR. ZIEGLER: I covered that yesterday. I do not think you were there, but just briefly, as I said yesterday, there is absolutely nothing to that. It keeps coming up again. I just saw a piece that ran in the Herald today that was written two or three days ago. That is when all of this began to build. There is nothing at all to that. I addressed that yesterday. I just suggest that people stay off of that because it just will not and cannot be substantiated.

Q Will there be a relationship between Mr. Schlesinger's successor at the AEC and the reorganization plans with respect to what you are going to do about energy?

MR. ZIEGLER: I am not briefed on that *Ques.* You know the subject far better than I do. I *would only give you* my personal feeling, and I assume there would be, *yes.*

We will post here at 5:00 o'clock *today and brief* here at 11:30 tomorrow.

I would suggest you check in here at *6:30 tomorrow* morning for the time of the meeting between *General Hzig and* the President if we have not included it *in the 5:00 o'clock* posting.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

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(AT 12:55 P.M. EST)